

# Session Report



## Making our communities safer

Several key pieces of legislation to make our communities safer were enacted by the Legislature this year. I have highlighted these measures below. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions.

### Dangerous mentally ill offenders

The state Department of Corrections releases more than 125 inmates each year who are both mentally ill and a threat to public safety. But, these people have completed their sentences. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, these offenders do not get the treatment they need upon release. This year we refined the post-release process to ensure appropriate and timely treatment. We also will monitor the effectiveness of this new process.

### Enhancing supervision of released offenders

This piece of legislation may be the most important sentencing policy change in the state in the last 15 years. This new law was crafted to protect the public and help offenders coming out of prison to turn their lives around and become productive citizens. More released inmates will have post-release supervision under this new process, and that supervision will be more positive — such as drug rehabilitation. Community corrections officers' duties will change from essentially surveillance to intervention. The basis for post-release supervision is shifted to reflect the level of risk the offender poses and the state Department of Corrections will develop a policy of graduated sanctions for violations.

### Transient sex offenders

For some time now, sex offenders who complete their sentences have had to register with the local sheriff's office when they establish a residence. This registration provides the opportunity for community notification. However, some offenders have been able to get around this requirement by claiming to be "transients." The new law we passed this year requires low risk offenders with no permanent address to report monthly, in person, to the local sheriff's office. Higher risk offenders must report, in person, on a weekly basis. This will allow for the monitoring of these offenders. Failure to register, whether an offender is transient or not, is a class C felony punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000.

### Sentencing options for drug and alcohol offenders

Sadly, about 70 percent of local jail inmates and a large percentage of state prison inmates are incarcerated because of drug related crimes — including offenders who let drug addiction play a role in their crime. The law we approved this year is a step toward a more rational approach to what some call "a crumbling system to combat illegal drug activity." This measure authorizes chemical dependency screenings as part of an offender's pre-sentence report and requires nonviolent, nonfelony offenders to serve the first half of their sentence in confinement and the second half in an approved treatment program. Eligibility for work ethic camps is expanded and eligibility for sentencing alternatives (treatment) is expanded.

Dear Friend:

*I am happy to report that citizens in Washington will be safer because of bills passed by the 1999 Legislature. Community supervision of released convicts for sex, violent and felony drug crimes will be increased; community supervision for juvenile offenders has been restored, stronger provisions have been established regarding the release of dangerous mentally ill offenders; and sentencing options for drug and alcohol offenders will be changed.*

*We also addressed a number of issues which will increase the quality of long-term care services for senior citizens and vulnerable adults.*

*And thanks to the voters who approved Referendum 49 last fall, we were able to give the go-ahead for a number of highway projects to relieve congestion and improve safety in all parts of the state. The 26th District fared very well in the distribution of these dollars.*

*My biggest disappointment this year is that we did not enact property tax relief. I believe my Republican colleagues and I in the Senate proposed a responsible plan to phase out the state's portion of the property tax (26% of a homeowner's bill), but the measure was not given a hearing. My efforts on this issue will continue because I believe it is the right thing to do and the right time to do it.*

*Overall, it was a busy session and I welcome this opportunity to report to you on my efforts and the accomplishments of 1999 Legislature.*

*If you have any questions about the issues in this newsletter, or questions about state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. I appreciate hearing from you and I am honored to serve you in the State Senate.*

*You can get a message to me by calling the toll free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000. You can also call my office directly at 360-786-7650. My Legislative Assistant, Michelle Lewis, will be very happy to assist you or relay your message to me.*

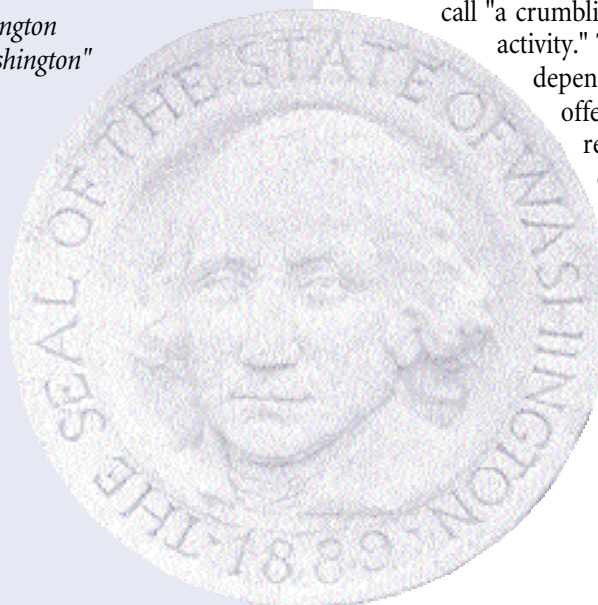
*If you have access to the Internet, you can email me at [oke\\_bo@leg.wa.gov](mailto:oke_bo@leg.wa.gov) and you can visit the Senate Republican Home Page at <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/senate/src/srchome.htm>.*

*You may also find it helpful to visit the Washington Government Information & Services "Access Washington" web site at <http://access.wa.gov/>.*

*I want to thank all of you who contacted me during the legislative session. Your ideas and opinions about legislation are a valuable part of the process.*

Sincerely,

BOB OKE  
State Senator



Helping young offenders turn their lives around

As a member of the Kitsap County Law & Justice Council, I became aware that a well-intended change in the juvenile parole program was not working. The effort to direct limited resources into better monitoring of juveniles with felony convictions was a good idea, but it came at the expense of being able to help youths with lesser crimes turn around their lives. This year we enhanced funding for the post-release supervision of all juvenile offenders so that we could restore the parole program for youths having committed minor crimes.

Homeless kids on the street

Youths who end up living on the street are at risk for so many problems — from drug use to falling victim to violent predators. This year, we provided funds in the two-year operating budget to start up a new program (HOPE) to provide sheltered care and responsible living skills for these young people.

The next step to keep cigarettes out of hands of youth

As many of you know, over the past nine years I have worked hard to combat the use of tobacco products by young people — 82 percent of today's adult smokers started before age 18. Three thousand youths start smoking every day in the United States, one third of whom will eventually die of tobacco-related illnesses.

To combat peer pressure and tobacco advertising — the major reasons young people start smoking — \$100 million from the state's share of the national tobacco settlement will be earmarked for tobacco use prevention programs. I was extremely pleased to see this step taken. (The remainder of Washington's tobacco settlement money will be used to fund the state's Basic Health Plan — the program that makes health insurance possible for low-income working families)

My other effort, the logical next step in fighting tobacco use by young people, overwhelmingly passed the Senate, but languished in the House of Representatives. This measure would have required retailers to lock up tobacco products. It is already illegal to sell tobacco products to minors, but this bill would have put these products out of reach as well. I will renew my effort to win full Legislative approval of this bill next year.

Promoting independence and quality long-term care

My colleagues and I worked in a number of areas this year to improve access to and the quality of long-term care services for disabled persons and senior citizens. Our goal is to help older and disabled persons stay vital and independent as long as possible and to ensure quality care for those who need a long-term care facility.

Individual Home Health Care Workers

Home health care workers help senior citizens care for themselves in their homes so that an assisted living or nursing care facility is not necessary. Such assistance can significantly extend an elderly person's independence. However, as with many service workers, the wage these care givers were earning was a disincentive for people to enter the field. The approval of the minimum wage proposal — Initiative 688 — last fall by Washington voters moved home health care workers up to a better starting wage. To augment this, my colleagues and I approved a two-step wage increase for workers contracting with the state — the first step will occur in July 1999 and the second in July 2000.

Personal aides for disabled persons

Current state law prohibits people without specific health care credentials from assisting disabled persons with tasks that people without disabilities customarily perform for themselves. This proved to be a barrier to disabled persons who are quite able to direct the care they need. The change in law enacted this year clarifies the right of adults with functional disabilities to choose to self-direct their own health related tasks in their own home. Clearly, it is in the public interest to preserve the autonomy and dignity of persons with functional disabilities by allowing them to care for themselves with the assistance of personal aides. As a safeguard, we added to the legal definition of "vulnerable adults" (which affords specific protections under the law) persons who use personal aides.

Endowment fund for developmentally disabled persons

Many parents of disabled children worry about the ongoing care of their children after they are gone. Because of legislation enacted this year, our state will become the first in the nation to implement a public/private partnership designed to help parents with disabled children save for the future care of those children by providing state matching dollars for private contributions. The state Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development will operate the fund and the state Investment Board will manage the investments. Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn is working at the federal level to make endowment fund moneys a "pre-tax" investment similar to a 401(K) plan.

Nursing home rates and chore service workers

The 1999-2000 state operating budget provides an increase in reimbursement rates for state clients being cared for in skilled nursing facilities; and funding is increased to recruit and train chore workers whose assistance with routine day-to-day household tasks helps seniors stay at home longer.

Shortening a nursing home stay and ensuring stability for residents

It can be very upsetting to a resident of a long-term care facility if he or she is sent to a different facility after being hospitalized. Many resident become comfortable in a particular facility. In such cases, they develop a sense of stability or a feeling that the facility is "home." Because of the need to protect this feeling of emotional well-being, we took steps this year to ensure that health carriers provide coverage if the "home" facility can meet the resident's post- hospitalization needs and if the resident or the resident's legal representative want the resident to go back to the same facility.

Stays in skilled nursing facilities for post-hospital patients who are still living independently can often be shortened with more intensive therapy. This year we authorized the Department of Social & Health Services to pay an exceptional rate of reimbursement in cases where more intensive therapy will allow the patient to go home sooner.



Pictured from left to right are four wonderful ladies who helped me tremendously this past session: Michelle Lewis, my Legislature Assistant; Judy Oke; Lisa Birnel, my intern from Pacific Lutheran University; and Cathy Thompson, my session aide.

*Special Note: Many of you will remember Sandy Johnson who was my Legislative Assistant for eight years. I am very sad to share with you that Sandy passed away last November after a long and courageous battle with cancer.*



## 4-H kids and state parks get needed funds

\$6 million was approved this year for the State Fair Fund to assist local agriculture fairs and youth shows during the next two years. No permanent solution to the lost funding from horse racing was achieved, but I will keep working with my colleagues to solve this challenge because I wholeheartedly support 4-H activities.

Last August, the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission threatened to close up to 40 state parks. Many of us vowed not to let this happen. The 1999-01 operating budget provides \$2.9 million for maintenance and operation; \$3 million for keeping parks open; and \$3 million for ranger safety. The 1999-01 capital construction budget provides an additional \$4 million for maintenance and operation — the largest need reported by the commission.

## Protecting children riding in small boats

Beginning July 25 of this year, children age 12 and younger must wear life vests while riding in a boat under 19 feet in length. Most parents and care givers look for life vests for their children when they board large boats, but few realize how unstable a small boat is in waters that would not otherwise cause a larger vessel problems. We also forget that a child can drown in only an inch or two of water.

There are always circumstances when some safety measures are not effective or even contrary, but these cases are rare. In most cases and under most circumstances, a life vest will save a child's life. This is why I worked so hard to get this new law enacted.

Thirty-three other states, including Oregon, have laws which require the wearing of life vests by children in small boats. Six of Washington's counties, including Pierce County, also have such a requirement.

The new law is supported by Mary Bridge Children's Hospital, the United States Coast Guard, the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Washington Boating Safety Officers Association.

## Voter-approved transportation funding comes to the 26th District

Because Washington voters approved Referendum 49 last November, the Legislature was able to fund a six-year plan for congestion relief and safety projects in every region of the state. Important to our community is the Tacoma Nalley Valley project which will greatly improve traffic flow from the Tacoma Dome to the Narrows Bridge.

### Projects funded in the 26th District:

- \$50 million to construct the approaches and HOV lane component of the Tacoma Narrows/SR 16 project. This is far and away one of the largest projects funded in the statewide budget\*
- \$1.4 million for SR 3 resurfacing from Sunnyslope to Gorst
- \$2 million for SR 16 interchange on west side of Tacoma Narrows/SR 16 project
- \$1.6 million to resurface SR 160 from SR 16 to ferry dock (some work began in February)
- \$3.4 million for SR 160 expansion from SR 16 to Longlake Road vicinity
- \$821,000 to resurface and install a new traffic signal at the Elgin-Clifton Road Intersection

\* While the governor vetoed the language that restricts the use of this \$50 million to the bridge approaches, the money remains in the budget with the strong support of the Legislature, the state Department of Transportation, and the state Transportation Commission.

### Southworth Ferry Service

Last year in my newsletter, I reported to you that I had been successful in winning authorization for two new passenger-only ferries and the necessary terminal and docking facilities for the Southworth to Seattle run. I am very pleased to report in this year's newsletter that the funding for these vessels and facilities was approved as part of the 1999-2001 transportation budget.

### Ross Point slide project

The needed state and federal funding has been made available to repair slide damage and regrade and stabilize the slope to prevent future rock/landslides. For about 45 days late this summer, SR 166 will be closed to allow the contractor to work double shifts, six days per week to get the buttress in prior to the fall rains.

### Key features of the Narrows Bridge contract

- Bonds will be tax-exempt (same as government bonds)
- There will be a fixed price (cost overruns will be borne by the contractor)
- Construction will be under one umbrella from start to finish (the cost-effective design-build method)
- Ownership of the bridge reverts to the state on opening day

### Highway 16 Corridor

The state is investing \$650 million over the next six years to improve the SR 16 Corridor. Projects include: improving and retrofitting the existing Narrows Bridge, a new traffic lane at Jackson Avenue; reconfiguration and improvements of the high-accident I-5/SR 16 interchange/Nalley Valley viaduct; a new Gig Harbor interchange; and the approaches/HOV component for the second bridge. In addition, the state is providing about \$70 million in exemptions and deferrals on the new bridge construction.

### Burley-Olalla Interchange

Despite the dangers we all know and live with at this intersection, our ranking for funding has not risen. This project is still on the waiting list, behind similar projects around the state with a higher fatal accident rate.

## Salmon Update

As we anticipated, on March 16 of this year, the National Marine Fisheries Service added the Puget Sound wild chinook salmon and eight other salmon species in Washington and Oregon to the federal Endangered Species list, marking the first time the far-reaching Endangered Species Act has been applied to such a vast urban area.

Legislation passed in 1998 created a "critical pathways methodology" to ensure salmon restoration activities are prioritized and implemented in order. It also established an independent science panel and an interagency review team to rank and dispense funds for habitat restoration projects. Local and regional groups have started plans to restore salmon runs in their areas.

In passing the 1999-01 budget this year, legislators approved nearly \$120 million from the salmon recovery account and other sources to be allocated by a ten-member salmon recovery board. Our focus remains on cooperative local and regional efforts.

In 1997, participants in the Timber, Fish, and Wildlife (TFW) process met with representatives from federal agencies to develop a comprehensive plan to address salmon and other aquatic species on forest lands. The plan is known as the forestry module of the state salmon plan.

This year, based on the forestry module, we approved a bill that provides a comprehensive approach toward forest practices impacting the recovery of salmon.

# Session Report

## Strengthening the Mobile Home Landlord Tenant Act

This year we worked to make the Mobile Home Landlord Tenant Act fairer to both tenants and landlords. For example, if a landlord requires a security deposit of more than two-month's rent, the money must be placed in a savings account with the interest going to the tenant.

## Worker safety and employee misconduct

Employee misconduct on the job can put all workers at risk and create unnecessary costs for employers. One of those costs is a safety violation fine. This is very unfair if the violation was the result of employee misconduct. This year we changed the law so that no fines can be handed out in these cases as long as the employer can demonstrate the existence of a safety program with rules and training.

## Students have opportunity to learn about government

Every year I have the pleasure of sponsoring several young people who work as "Senate Pages" for a week. These students learn first-hand about government and are able to share their experiences with fellow students when they return to school. If your child will be age 14 or 15 during the 2000 Legislative session (January 19 to March 10), and is interested in becoming a page, please contact Michelle in my office at 360-786-7560.

### Thanks to my 1999 Pages

Yonathan Ahdut, Foss High School  
 Abbie Harkson, Kopachuck Middle School  
 Michael McCausland, home schooled  
 Adrienne Salzwedel, Sedgewick Jr. High School  
 Suzanne Spadoni, Harbor Ridge Middle School  
 Collin Stephens, Upper Room Christian Home School  
 Asia Wright, Peninsula High School  
 Katey Lutes, Cedar Heights Jr. High School  
 Jessie Uddenberg, St. Charles Borromeo



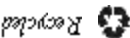
I am very happy to report that the World War II Memorial on the state capitol campus is a reality -- something that should have been done 50 years ago. It was an honor for me to have served on the committee which chose the site and design. The memorial was dedicated on Friday, May 28. I hope each of you will get the chance to walk the site and remember the men and women who fought so bravely to preserve our freedom.

## We must remember

The World War II Memorial honors all those in Washington state who played a role in the war effort. It's design is inspired by themes from "America the Beautiful." Walkways traverse through two main elements: five vaulting bronze leaves inscribed with the names of Washington residents who gave their lives and four foot high flowering bronze stalks of wheat symbolic of a river weaving its way over the plains to sea.

## How To Contact Me

Please send all mail to my Olympia office at P.O. Box 40482, Olympia WA 98504-0482. You can always get a message to me by calling my Legislative Assistant, Michelle Lewis, at 360-786-7650. The toll free legislative hotline operates year-round, so please feel free to call 1-800-562-6000 and one of the hotline staff members will be sure I get your message. I also now have a fax in my office. That number is 360-786-7651. And, of course, you are welcome to send me an email at oke\_bo@leg.wa.gov.



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